CLAIMS

1. A system for controlling the use of a software application on a plurality of computers, the system comprising:

   a plurality of computers, each capable of running a given software application,

   a server having a server store,

   communication means respectively permitting communication between each said computer and said server, and

   a transaction arrangement operable respectively between each said computer and said server by way of said communication means for enabling a predetermined use of said given software application by respective ones of said computers,

   in which said server controls said predetermined use by means of said transaction arrangement and according to conditions stored in said server store.

2. A system according to claim 1 in which said transaction arrangement determines access of each said computer to said given software application.

3. A system according to claim 1 in which said transaction arrangement determines parameters of operation for said given software application.

4. A system according to claim 1 in which said server controls the number of said computers authorised to run said given software application.

5. A system according to claim 1 in which said given software application comprises at least one computer program operable under license, and in which said transaction arrangement comprises license management means for verifying the

availability for a respective said computer of a said license for said at least one computer program.

6. A system according to claim 5 in which said license management means further comprise means for controlling license rights available under said license, and means for configuring said respective computer to operate according to said rights.

7. A system according to claim 5 in which said license management means comprise said server store, said server store for storing therein different possible license rights available under said license, selection means for selecting at least one said license right from said server store, and activation means for activating said at least one license right for a respective said computer.

8. A system according to claim 7 in which said license management means further comprise a store at said respective computer for storing details of said at least one license right, and means for updating said stored details on use of said computer program.

9. A system according to claim 5 in which said license management means are adapted to transfer a license from one said computer to another said computer.

10. A system according to claim 9 in which said license management means are arranged to inhibit operation of said computer program on said one computer following said transfer.

11. A license management system for controlling the use of at least one given software application respectively on a plurality of computers, said system comprising:

an application store associated with each said computer for storing a copy of said given software application;

a remote data store for storing information concerning a license to operate said at least one given software application;

5 a remote data store for storing identification information relating to said at least one given software application;

a remote data store for storing identification information relating to each said computer; and

a transaction arrangement operatively linking said application store, said

10 license store, said software identification store and said computer identification store, said transaction arrangement being responsive to a request from a respective said computer for use of said at least one given software application to verify whether said at least one given software application is available for use by said respective computer and to transmit to said respective computer a said license to

15 use said at least one given software application in the event that said at least one given software application is so available.

12. A license management system according to claim 11 comprising a server providing said license store, said software identification store and said computer

20 identification store.

13. A license management system according to claim 11 in which said server controls the number of said licenses available.

25 14. A license management system according to claim 13 in which said server is adapted to transfer a license from one said computer to another said computer.

15. A license management system according to claim 14 in which said server is arranged to inhibit operation of said computer program on said one computer following said transfer.

16. A license management system according to claim 11 comprising a further license store provided at each said computer for storing locally information concerning said license.

17. A license management system according to claim 11 in which said transaction arrangement determines parameters of operation for said given software application.

18. A license management system according to claim 11 in which the said transaction arrangement comprises means for verifying the rights available under a said license.

19. A license management system according to claim 11 in which said license store has a data store for storing therein different possible license rights available under said license, and in which said transaction arrangement comprises selection means for selecting at least one said license right from said store, and activation means for activating said at least one license right for a respective said computer.

20. A license management system according to claim 19 in which said activation means comprise a license rights store associated with said respective computer for storing details of said at least one license right, and means for updating said license rights store according to the current state of said at least one license right on use of said computer program.

21.   A computer programmed to perform a transaction for enabling the operation of a given software application, the transaction arrangement comprising:

creating a license file for a license to operate said given software application;

assigning to said license file a serial number representing said given software application;

assigning to said license file an identification code representing said computer;

transmitting to a server a request to execute said given software application;

transmitting with said request said serial number and said identification code;

in response to a server reply updating the license file with information concerning the availability of said license; and

reading said license file for establishing whether said given software application can be executed.

22.   A computer programmed according to claim 21 in which said transaction arrangement further comprises:

in response to said server reply updating said license file with details of license rights transmitted from said server; and

configuring said computer according to said license rights to execute a predetermined software feature incorporated in said given software application.

23.   A method for controlling the execution of a given software application on a plurality of computers in a computer system including a server, said method comprising the steps of:

creating a license file on a respective said computer for a license to operate said given software application;

license

assigning to the license file an identification code representing said respective computer;

formulating a request to execute said given software application at said respective computer, said request including a serial number associated with said given software application and said identification number;

transmitting said request with said serial number and said identification code to a server;

in response to a reply from said server updating the license file with information concerning the availability of said license; and

reading said license file for establishing the status of said license at said respective computer.

24. A method according to claim 23 further comprising:

storing at said server information concerning rights available under said license;

in response to said request from said respective computer selecting respective license rights to be applied to said respective computer and transmitting details of said selected rights to said respective computer;

in response to said server reply updating said license file with details of said selected license rights transmitted from said server; and

configuring said computer according to said selected license rights to execute a predetermined software feature incorporated in said given software application.

25. A method according to claim 24 further comprising:

updating said license file on an ongoing basis during use of said predetermined feature by said respective computer to record a current state of said license; and

when said license is no longer required transmitting details from said updated license file of said current state to said server.